



CHLAMYDIA

What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted disease caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*, which can damage a woman's reproductive organs. Even though symptoms of chlamydia are usually mild or absent, serious complications that cause irreversible damage, including infertility, can occur silently before a woman ever recognizes a problem.

Who gets chlamydia?

Sexually active men and women can be exposed to chlamydia during sexual contact with an infected person. The greater the number of sex partners, the greater the risk of infection.

Sexually active teenage girls and young women are at particularly high risk for infection because the cervix (opening to the uterus) is not fully matured. Sexually active people can get chlamydia through vaginal, anal, or oral sex without a condom with a partner who has chlamydial infection.

How is chlamydia spread?

Chlamydia can be transmitted during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Chlamydia can also be passed from an infected mother to her newborn during vaginal childbirth.

What are the symptoms of chlamydia?

Chlamydia is known as a "silent" infection because most infected people have no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they may not appear until several weeks after exposure. Even when it causes no symptoms, chlamydia can damage a woman's reproductive organs.

In women, the bacteria first infect the cervix and/or the urethra. Some infected women have an abnormal vaginal discharge or a burning sensation when urinating. Untreated infections can spread upward to the uterus and fallopian tubes, causing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID can be silent or can cause symptoms such as abdominal and pelvic pain. Even if PID causes no symptoms initially, it can lead to infertility and other complications months or years later.

Some infected men have discharge from their penis or a burning sensation when urinating. Pain and swelling in one or both testicles (known as "epididymitis") may also occur but is less common.



Frequently Asked Questions

Chlamydia can also infect the rectum in men and women through anal sex or spread from the cervix and vagina. While these infections often cause no symptoms, they can cause rectal pain, discharge, and/or bleeding (known as “proctitis”).

How soon do symptoms appear?

Chlamydia often has no symptoms. If symptoms occur, they may not appear until several weeks after having sex with a partner who has chlamydia.

What is the treatment for chlamydia?

Chlamydia can be easily treated and cured with antibiotics. A single dose of azithromycin or a week of doxycycline (twice daily) are the most commonly used treatments. All sex partners should be evaluated, tested, and treated. Persons with chlamydia should abstain from sexual intercourse until they and their sex partner(s) have completed treatment; otherwise, re-infection is possible. Women whose sex partner(s) have not been appropriately treated are at high risk for re-infection. Having multiple infections increases a woman’s risk of serious reproductive health complications, including infertility.

What can a person do to prevent the spread of chlamydia?

The surest way to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases is to abstain from sexual contact, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Latex or polyurethane condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of chlamydia.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
<https://www.cdc.gov/std/chlamydia/default.htm>